

CHALLENGES IN PROMOTING MUSSEL FARMING INDUSTRY IN A DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

Zaiga Ozoliņa

Mg. oec.

Biruta Sloka

Dr. oec.

Abstract

Blue mussels are widely distributed in European waters. Mussels are used in food industry and for animal feed; as well it is “green product” with growing consumption. This article analyses promotion activities in the digital environment, which have been implemented by mussel farmers or industry promoters. The aim of this article is to analyse academic publication findings, to evaluate the available digital marketing information about mussel farming and indicate the most efficient use of the digital marketing. Research methods: analysis of scientific publications, analysis of resources published on the Internet and social media in the field of mussel farming. The main findings of the research: researchers of blue mussel are those who occasionally update information on the websites about the topic; some of them have established specific blogs. In addition to researchers’ publications, the information on mussels can be found in social media via photos and videos. Professional associations take part by publishing information in social media networks, making them more attractive for stakeholders and promoting their activities in the society. Direct marketing is not common form in this field. However, the lack of information published by mussel farmers in social media has influenced stakeholders’ interest and might affect the development of the industry. The research has revealed the regional divergence in market players’ behaviour. The results of published researches indicate that blue mussel industry has potential that has not been brought to light for the society in the global market.

Key words: digital marketing, mussel farming, green marketing, promotion activities

Introduction

Mussel farming takes on more and more importance in many countries including Norway where many activities are taken to make mussel products available for consumers and perceived opportunities and pursued strategies are examined (Ottesen, Grønhaug, 2004). Mussels are used in the food industry, for animal feed, as well as a fertilizer (Gouletquer, 2014). Blue mussel intakes phosphor and nitrogen by filtering water (Lindahl, 2012). The development of mussel production is fostered by distributing

the product in the international market similarly as it has been done with Chilean or New Zealand mussels. Mussel cultivation in the Baltic Sea has not been widespread.

Digital marketing as a promotional tool has become increasingly popular and has been studied in academic research. With the increasing influence of the Internet, many promotional activities have been done through websites.

Products which are environmental-friendly might be distributed as a “green product” which fosters its consumption. However, product labelling with a “green-product” sign is not always promotional, as there might arise connotations that the product is more expensive. Therefore, more academic research is devoted to this topic.

This article analyses the promotion activities in the digital environment, which have been implemented by mussel farmers or industry promoters.

The aim of this research is to analyse academic publication findings, to evaluate the available digital marketing information about mussel farming and indicate the most efficient use of the digital marketing.

The research objectives: to analyse scientific findings regarding the marketing approaches in mussel production; to analyse practical findings and publications on the Internet and social media; and to perform the content analysis of publications on marketing approaches in mussel production.

The research methods: The analysis of scientific publications and the analysis of resources published on the Internet and social media in the field of mussel farming.

Theoretical findings

“Fisheries markets are undergoing a major transformation because of globalisation and the ever-growing liberalisation of international trade” (Laxe et al., 2016). Increasing interest in the Baltic Sea Region to encourage blue mussel farming requires new promotion activities. Successful distribution of product would contribute mussel farmers to become wealthier. Successful product promotion would persuade researchers to investigate the field broader. For the time being several topics in scientific publications have been found: on modelling of blue mussel production (Atalah, et al, 2017), on seasonal and geographical aspects of blue mussel production (Fernández, et al., 2015), and on aspects of mussel farm size (Kraufvelin and Díaz, 2015). Moreover, marine issues are regulated by the European Union and mentioned in Europe’s Blue Economy (Winder and Heron, 2017), as well as analysis of extensive experience on mussel culture and consumption in Spain (Figueras, 1990). Economic aspects and feasibility on

mussel production as co-activity has been also on interest of researchers (Buck, et al., 2010).

Promotion is defined as all the activities that are directly related to publicity, advertisement, sales promotion, packaging, exhibitions, and direct marketing advertising with a customer (Baker, 2003). In the 1960s, a model called the Adaptive Planning and Control Sequence was developed to determine the optimal promotion mix (Petit and McEnally, 1985).

Peattie and Peattie (1994) define marketing limits as follows: “marketing activities – usually specific to a time period, place or customer group, which encourage a direct response from consumers or marketing intermediaries, through the offer of additional benefits”.

Mussels’ sales have been generally increased within the European market (Girard and Mariojouis, 2003). Different countries have various approaches to mussel marketing (Bhatta, 2002). Specific marketing aspects are applied for ethnic food marketing (Choi and Henneberry, 2000) and the traditions of their use (Acebron and Dopico, 1999). Mussels’ production place has to be chosen carefully therefore, scientists are conducting researches to find better solutions (Mongruel and Thébaud, 2006).

The interest to develop sea aquaculture has increased by investigating research projects and publishing research results. An increasing demand for fish products (The World Bank, 2013) also encourages entrepreneurs to produce and promote sea products.

The companies prepare different kind of marketing materials for promoting amounts of sales and consumption promotion. Several researchers as for example King have pointed out in 1985 misunderstanding aspects of incorrect marketing and has mentioned that not everything that companies define as marketing can be applied to marketing (King, 1985; Peattie and Crane, 2005).

Green products are not always profitable and they might be expensive (Walley and Whitehead, 1994). Moreover, researchers state that “Green marketing and advertising are ever popular strategies to reconcile business interests with ecological interests, and more precisely, with the increased concern for sustainability issues” (Alves, 2009).

Some promotional materials are prepared to create an outstanding image of the company whereas some provide the wrong feedback. The companies, which have been on the frontline as a target for criticism use “green spinning”. “Green spinning was always going to fail because unless they are involved and consulted, contemporary consumers and pressure groups are unlikely to be fully convinced by the protestations of commercial enterprises” (Peattie and Crane, 2005).

Social media influence and the use of social media for marketing are on researchers’ agenda as well: “Social media have changed marketing

by shifting the scalability of influence, and the ways in which consumers share, evaluate and choose information” (Smithee, 2011; Moustakas, 2016). Use of different marketing channels could create some problems, which are “With the advent of computer networks and entertainment programs, traditional media, including television, have lost viewer or readership and the power of advertising has been reduced”. Moreover, “the rapidity of online communication and multiple information sources make the advertising and marketer sourced promotion considerably less relevant” (Patino, Pitta and Quinones, 2012).

Promotion activities have been changed in last decades and are used in all fields: this process is going to continue with development of different marketing channels and extensive use of new information technologies tools.

Globalisation has started to change consumer mentality regarding ethnic food consumption. Due to a shift of the ethnic ratio of inhabitants, the consumption of ethnic food or regional traditional food has shifted. Consumers are expressing their interest in ethical consumption (Bray et al., 2011; Carrigan et al., 2004; Kim and Chung, 2011). The increasing interest in ethical consumption among consumers refers to some appropriate grounds such as heightened media coverage, proliferated levels of information, and increased availability of “alternative” products (Strong, 1996; Newholm and Shaw, 2007). In addition, consumers are ready to pay premium price for fish (Leek et al., 1998). As an example, inhabitants have started to use marine products, which traditionally were not widely and commonly used in the Baltic Sea area, such as seaweeds, shrimps in the Baltic Sea Region.

The financial crisis and free access to social media have reshaped the flow of and access to promotional information, and the more extensive use of this information for personal and business purposes.

Deeper analysis in the field of end-user behavioural studies has not been carried out indicating the awareness and responsibility of mussel consumption for mussel production in mussel’s farms for agricultural or environmental purposes. Mussels are known as supporters of environment protection – they act as water cleaners by filtering it. That might change the consumer mentality about the price of the product as people are more interested to consume “green products” and they are ready to support this kind of production.

Publications on mussel farming on the Internet

There are specialised authorities who actively work on marketing activities on mussel farming and consumption of mussel farming products.

One of such sources is marketing research company “Brand24” performing analysis and being one of the most effective method of monitoring respective brand or product on the Internet. It is also a tool that measures the buzz around the respective brand, product or keyword. To analyse promotional activities in mussel farming the Internet source “Brand24” was used. On the website, specific words were selected (mussel, mussels blue mussel, mussel farming) and found using word search, thus indicating word use frequency.

Table 1. The key words mentioned in English on Internet in the last 12 month
(situation on September 20, 2018)

Selected words	Total	Face-book	Twitter	Insta-gram	Blogs	Forum	News	Video	Other
Mussels	9564	2118	1486	2948	2285	241	87	195	204
Mussel	3685	409	408	1185	1159	47	65	133	279
Mussel farming	223	3	125	7	18	2	8	2	58
Blue mussel	390	15	173	55	38		13	13	83
Sea aquaculture	50		23		2		7	3	15

Information source: Zaiga Ozoliņa’s calculations based on collected information in website Brand24, 2018

In the last 12 months, the word “mussel” or “mussels” was mentioned mainly in Instagram, and *Facebook* was the second most important source.

People share photos from dinner, preparing food in the kitchen or photos from nature. People like to publish information about themselves sharing photos.

The main part of information in the position “other” comes from projects on mussel production and consumption supported by the European Regional Development Bank or by regional institutions or information published as job advertisements.

The word “mussel” or “mussels” together with words specifying the Baltic Sea Region (Germany, Sweden or Denmark) were mentioned only in two companies’ websites during the last 12 months.

In the Baltic Sea Region, there are many companies working in the mussel farming industry or selling mussels, and only a couple of them have homepages. Some of the companies are involved in publication activities, and others do not promote their company or products at all.

The mussel might be popularised using green marketing tools because it intakes nutrients from water however this kind of product is not cheap.

Mussel farmers do not invest in the popularisation of their products, but researchers update their websites to inform the society about their achievements. The results showed that mussel farming is not well promoted by entrepreneurs in the Baltic Sea Region. Empirical investigations confirm that several neighbouring countries apply the same approach to promote the mussel production industry, but they do not publish information in English and they update the information rarely. The collected information did not testify that different countries had different approaches on mussel marketing (Bhatta, 2002); for example, several associations (in New Zealand or in Canada) shared information on their websites, thus, increasing stakeholder's interest in their country, whereas in the United Kingdom they promoted products on a company's website.

The absence of promotional materials might affect customers' interest. The consumer does not have information about the trading areas or the food recipe is in a foreign language that makes it difficult to ascertain the way the product should be used. Customer search websites for information, thus increasing its awareness on the product or information regard the product.

Promotional activities on mussel farming have not been organised regularly, the documents are prepared with long-term intervals, and it does not intensify informative reliability of the mussel production industry and business.

The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (2012; 2017) and the World Bank (2013) fill in the lack of information by preparing reports about a certain task and provide comprehensive information about the mussel production especially taking into account the benefits for cleaner environment. These reports are based on well-grounded facts and are used also by researchers worldwide for their own papers.

There are statistical data and reports prepared by different European institutions, for example, *EUROFISH* and *EUFOMA*. The mentioned institutions also use the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations data and some of the reports are well grounded.

Market analysis of blue mussel industry perspective has been carried out in several countries and some of the research was carried out by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations.

Developers of blue mussel's market have published information on their own websites; some of them have established specific webpages. Professional associations take part in publishing information on mussel production and possible consumption in social media networks, making them more attractive for stakeholders and promoting their activities in the society. Direct marketing is not a very common form in the

mussel production industry. The lack of information in the social media has influenced the interest of stakeholders and might affect industry development as well.

Due to the published research results, it is possible to observe the increase of interest of stakeholders, scientists and regional governmental institutions taking an active role in the development of mussel production industry.

Research has revealed the regional divergence in market players' behaviour in the Baltic Sea Region.

Promotional activities by public organisations

In 2013, the government of Canada was involved in mussel farming marketing activities to support the industry by “repairing” sales volumes decrease of blue mussel and increase the amount of sales in the world after the financial crisis of 2007–2008. The mussel were kept in water for several years due to overproduction of mussels and above-mentioned promotional activities helped to sell these mussels (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2013).

In India, there were districts where women were involved in mussel farming. They were provided with instruction in mussel culture and the World Bank (Department of Agriculture, Government of Maharashtra, 1994; Vipinkumar, 2013) financed these activities.

Other promotional activities organised by the public organisation were not reflected in scientific publications.

Using digital marketing as a promoter of the mussel farming industry

Interest in mussel product decreases because of unregularly organised promoting activities in mussel market. One of the reasons might be the consequences of market failures. “From the perspective of market-environmentalism, environmental problems are basically conceived as the consequence of “market failures” (Muradian and Cardenas, 2015). It does not have either negative (pollution) or positive (ecosystem services) externalities. As argued by Cohen and Winn (2007) market imperfections provide opportunities for entrepreneurs to develop new technology and new business models that aid the sustainable development (Mattson, 2016).

Collecting information about different countries' experience, the authors have found that the mussel production industry might be promoted using the Internet as a place where the basic information on the market

situation is updated regularly, which is useful for the end user – mussel consumers. For example – a recipe of meals from mussels or a photo of dish with mussels, thus, the product user could benefit.

Kumar (2017) published and discussed his extensive research results highlighting the following themes of the green advertisement focusing on consumer – focused intent (see figure 1)

Company – focused intent	Intent to communicate corporate environmental approaches	Intent to develop believability towards environmental claims
	Intent to inform consumers	Intent to engage consumers
	Consumer – focused intent	

Source: Kumar, 2017

Figure 1. Intent classification on “green advertisement”

Mussels are promoted as a product for human consumption as environmental friendly product, and it might be promoted as well as a tool that reduces nutrients (Stadmark and Conley, 2011) in water (such farms are established between fish farms, for example in Denmark). It is also possible to relocate mussels from one place to another in order to restore destroyed mussel beds. Promotional materials about mussel farming might cover several research topics mentioned in Kumar’s (2017) research:

- mussels reduce nutrient and increase water transparency, this also fosters the development of healthy spawning grounds, and sometimes mussel farms work as feeding area for birds; and
- mussels are used as food for humans for many centuries. The recipes and product nutrition in recent years are more frequently uploaded on the Internet. It increases the end-user interest in the product.

The website with target audience segmentation helps to identify all the market players and differentiate customers according to their needs and producer/distributor offers.

The content for creating the necessary marketing techniques is a key component for every self-respecting market player. Researchers have proposed that it might be divided into static content, dynamic content and user generated content (Chaffey and Smith, 2012). The content might be extended by including instructive and educative information in various formats (Holliman and Rowley, 2014).

The promoter of farming should recognise the target market and the target audience considering his or her own product and service possibilities.

Working responsibly and creating the long-term mutual business relationships with either business players or product consumers a common goal is to reshape the consumer society driven behaviour into environmentally responsible user behaviour.

Pulizzi et al. (2011) have indicated business aims of content marketing:

- Brand awareness and reinforcement
- Lead conversation and nurturing
- Customer conversion
- Customer upsell
- Passionate subscriber.

As regards the field of mussel farming, the responsible customers nurturing starts by the involvement of stakeholders in creating an active social platform, thus connecting the existing scientific environment together with consumer's environment by raising the awareness of the use of the natural resources and their connection with the common ecosystem and participation in a food chain.

Mussels are "super green food" that offer tremendous health benefits. In addition mussels are low-fat products and they are an excellent source of protein Omega-3s, iron, zinc, vitamin C and B12 (Chronicle-Tribune, 2011). "Mussels play a key role in aquatic environments and are considered to be "ecosystem engineers" because they modify aquatic habitat, making it more suitable for themselves and other organisms" (Jovic and Stankovic, 2013).

"Mussels are a logical, environmentally responsible and healthful choice" (Cooper, 2015) as they are taking an important role in the aquatic environment. Proper care of the ecosystem and highly valued nutrition places this product on the top of the wholesome food list. These are the basic factors that allow one to revalue this product and range it among the high value added products for general consumption and all those aspects are important to take into account for mussel products marketing activities.

Passionate subscribers might encourage promotional advertising and educational activities providing the necessary information and new ways of how to use the product in consumer's environment. The visual communication via photos and videos play an important role in advertising the blue mussel. This might be a potentially successful channelling tool for producers for further educational and content marketing activities.

Branding and promotion of trademarks have not been analysed in this research.

Every step in mussel product marketing should meet the global principles of environmental responsibility.

The main novelty of the research: researchers of blue mussel are those who occasionally update information on the websites about the topic; some of them have established specific blogs. In addition to researchers'

publications, the information on mussels can be found in social media via photos and videos. Professional associations take part in publishing social media networks, making them more attractive for stakeholders and promoting their activities in the society. Direct marketing is not common form in this field. However, the lack of information published by mussel farmers in the social media has influenced stakeholders' interest and might affect the development of the industry. The research has revealed the regional divergence in market players' behaviour.

The topicality of the research is the fact that blue mussel industry has potential that has not been brought to light for the society in the global market.

Conclusions, proposals, recommendations

1. The use of blue mussel in human consumption has been increased and influenced by globalisation, ethnic and traditional cuisine.
2. Promotion activities of mussel farming and mussel products are not well presented on webpages and social networks. The information about mussel farming and produced mussel products should be systemised and deliberately distributed to reach the target audience and interact with all stakeholders.
3. Creation of digital marketing platforms that are content driven is underway and is only at the beginning of its experience in mussel product marketing.
4. The promotional advertising and educational activities provided by passionate subscribers have not been set up. Dynamic content marketing might encourage a customer to return to buy a product repeatedly. It is possible to increase a product value by mentioning its benefits, therefore increasing customer's willingness to pay more for the product.
5. The common goal for either business players or product consumers is to reshape the consumer society driven behaviour into environmentally responsible user behaviour for creating long-term mutual business relationship. This task might be analysed in other research.
6. Customer conversion requires a particular research as it involves digital marketing and necessary feedback to react upon and reshape the behaviour of the customer and the market.

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